

“Far Sight”
by: Jeremy Anderson

The air was oppressive. It was a force of nature, like bog vapors or a cloud of poisonous gas, that must be traversed. The scene was alive with vagabonds and Virgils that been through this special circle before...this square.

Elliot dragged her boyfriend through the carnival air, paying no mind to the odorous lingering of the night before—somewhere between the stench of the trash piled up on the abbreviated curbs and the smell of vomit that a shopkeeper’s early morning water hose had missed. She looked back through the lens of her smartphone and captured the surprised smirk on his face that melted into a smile. The shot bounced as the couple bounded through a throng of tourists who scarcely looked up from their street maps and novelty hand grenade glasses.

The Bacchanalian spirit had captured Elliot that day. She sprang along the the rows of venders lining the the great iron gates. Past the silver metallic painted street performer in a matching tri-corner hat. Past the open guitar case street musicians peddling another tired version of “Amazing Grace” that medleyed into “House of the Rising Sun” in exchange for coins and loose cigarettes. To arrive at last to the inner circle of pagans—the tarot card readers, the voodoo healers, the traiteurs, psychics, and....palm readers. The most inviting one smiled at Elliot from under the shade of a tarp covered tent—the kind you might see tailgating outside a sports arena. Vaguely Catholic themed paintings hung from the corners of the tent—the Sacred Heart of Mary and a portrait of the Crucifixion—narrowed the passage of the entryway. Elliot slipped through with her long pale arm towing a sheepishly resistant boyfriend into the lair. The tent seemed roomier on the inside. It was finished only with a card table draped in a midnight blue velvet table cloth and three wooden deck chairs that sat upon an orange imitation of an Oriental rug.

“Greetings,” chirped the older woman in a voice that did not correspond to the image of the barrel chested wooden Indian statue of a woman that stood before them. Perhaps, the woman forgot which job she was moonlighting at and defaulted to the voice of a PoliSci teacher. She remedied her presentation and adopted the voice of a wise elder for the next phrase “Who do we have here?”

“You’re the psychic.” Elliot’s boyfriend sounded, perhaps picking up on the palm reader’s momentary lapse in mystique. “You tell us.” His voice captured his own insecurity and loaded more gunpowder into his smartass muzzle.

Elliot reacted by playfully slapping him. The crystals in the old woman’s hair glittered as she shook her head as if an attempt to deflect the barb. She smiled again deciding to regard the young man’s cynicism as playful humor. Elliot joined her with an embarrassed ‘forgive him’ smile. “I’m Elliot and he is—“

“Irving” The palm reader interjected. The young man’s smirk cracked open and his mouth hung agape for a moment. He shot a look at Elliot.

“This is a joke,” escaped his ajar disbelief. A sort of glassy worry shone in Elliot’s eyes and was applied under the LED flameless candle light. But again a smile surfaced and she reassuringly squeezed her significant other’s hand. Still wrestling with a conspiracy theory in his mind, he barely felt the touch. ‘Somewhere between the hotel, the parking garage, the streetcar, and Jackson Square she had paid the crackpot to say that...’ he thought. He missed the palmistry disclaimer about the donation system used to pay the woman for her palmistry. Otherwise, he would have objected to the affair. The first palm exchange took place while he pondered the New Orleans Illuminati. Elliot crushed a twenty into the old woman’s hand. The woman placed the bill into a fish bowl bellow the velvet table shroud. She then grasped Elliot’s hand and flattened her fingers against the table to stretch out her palm.

“What should the reading focus on? Your future success? Family?——“ the palm reader was cut off.

“Just the lotto numbers please” The boyfriend interrupted as if removed from his trance. The reader’s face contorted with annoyance.

“Sir,” She said regaining some territory in composure. “The lady,” she paused as if retracing transcripts of the exchange in her head for the young lady’s name. “Ellie has p—— donated for the reading therefore she shall dictate the direction of the reading.” The old woman’s middle finger scratched through a tiny diverging valley in Elliot’s palm and she perked up.

Elliot paid little mind to the mismanaging of her name by future seer but more to the admonishing the gypsy lady had given her boyfriend. “He’s just playing!” she chimed. A look of disbelief came forth from the woman’s face.

The young man came to his girlfriend’s aid with another quip, “Look, ma’am, we just want our money’s worth. How about the exact time and date of Armageddon?”

“Sir, I wish I knew.” The old woman pretended to laugh. At the moment she thought that the end of the world seemed closer than the close of the mouth on the asshole before her. She started to explain that palm reading did not yield answers to such questions but the boyfriend interjected again. This time he was more apologetic as he sensed that there was still a spirit of magic in the palm reading to Elliot. If it was important to her and if it made her smile, he could suffer through keeping his mouth shut.

Under the new and sudden sense of cooperation the ‘gypsy’ began to tell of Elliot’s future success in design and the city she would reside in. They both giggled as the reader surprised the girl with the relation between a shallow groove in Elliot’s palm and an inside joke she shared with her mother. The whole spiel was otherwise lackluster to the boyfriend who began to place his own palm on the velvet tablecloth. He fumbled with resignation as he listened to his girlfriend laugh with the reader. He felt a slick object no bigger than or thicker than a business card under the covering.

Then the reading ended. Elliot thanked the lady. Her boyfriend knew that Elliot would be content with the amount of gossip she could derive from the experience. He tipped the reader a five

dollar bill. There had been some reconciliation for the rocky exchange earlier. The couple embraced and turn toward the subtropical air outside the tent to continue the pilgrimage and pillaging of the French Quarter. The lady spoke up, again returning to her chirpy political science teacher voice. She ripped the cloth off the table to reveal the wooden card table underneath. For a second the blue tablecloth fluttered and blotted out the flickering LED candlelight, but a few strands of light passed through before the eclipse was over. The table was adorned with a set of tarot cards. "Would you like to see what the cards have in store for you, ma'am? or Sir?"

The boyfriend twisted around and hissed in a mild anger turned to snark. He slapped his finger down on the very card he had fumble with earlier underneath the cloth. "I have a premonition. This," he tapped his finger on the card "Is a full dance card."

Eliot stepped up partly to apologize and partly to get on the middle of any hostilities that may arise. "No, thanks. We'll leave. I'm sorry"

"You don't have to leave" the old woman returned to her village elder voice. "Just him."

"Don't talk to him like that. That's my boyfriend!"

The boyfriend felt a sense of pride before the gypsy dashed it with "You two won't be together forever, my dear."

He clenched his fist behind his girlfriend "Oh yeah? the cards tell you that?"

"Oh no," the old woman said through a crazy smile. "I haven't even touched the cards yet."

The boyfriend thought this was usually the part of the movie when the gypsy puts a curse on the troublesome customer. Instead he removed his finger from the table. His sweaty finger stuck to the card and it clung to him for a brief second before it flipped over and fell. He gave a snarky salute and edged backwards into the humid day. Elliot's eyes met the palm reader's. She started to mouth "I'm so sorry" but she was distracted by a card on the table and retreated as well.

Despite the busy streets and summer air, the walk back to the streetcar station was somehow colder and quiet. The two had resigned to go back to the hotel. As the vehicle bounced along Canal Street, Elliot asked the Fool if they could have a serious talk.